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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 GENEVA 000183

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SUBJECT: FEBRUARY 17-18 GENEVA TALKS ON GEORGIA: READOUT
FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON SECURITY

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/// C O R R E C T E D C O P Y PAR ONE NEEDED CLASSIFICATION ///

Classified By: CDA Mark Storella, Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During the February 17-18 Geneva Talks on Georgia, the Working Group on Security accepted by consensus &Proposals for joint incident prevention and response Mechanisms.8 The mechanisms -- one for Abkhazia and one for South Ossetia -- will consist of &representatives of structures with responsibility for security and public order8 (Georgian, Russian, and separatist), as well as &representatives of international organizations8 (UN, OSCE and EU). The possibility of joint visits by the participants to &sites of incidents8 was the most contentious point of the discussion, with significantly watered-down language leaving it to the de facto authorities to approve of access for the mechanisms, participants to the separatist regions. The Working Group on internally displaced persons and humanitarian issues failed to reach agreement on a document that would have granted humanitarian access to the separatist regions from both north and south, amid strong opposition from South Ossetian and Russian representatives. No plenary session was held and there was no discussion of the future UN or OSCE mandates for Georgia. End Summary.

Format

¶2. (SBU) The Geneva talks on Georgia began on February 17 at 15:00 and ended on February 18 at 14:00. The entire course of the discussions was spent in working group sessions, with a lunch for all participants held at the conclusion of the talks. Although there was no plenary session, the plenary representatives (EU Special Representative Pierre Morel, UN Special Representative Johan Verbeke, OSCE Special Envoy Charalampos Christopoulos, EUR A/S Fried, Georgian Deputy FM Giga Bokeria, and Russian Deputy FM Grigoriy Karasin) sat at one table during the lunch, while the de facto Abkhaz and South Ossetian representatives sat at separate tables with the other participants.

Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism

¶3. (SBU) The Working Group on Security and Stability spent the entire course of the two days discussing the proposed agreement on a Joint Incident Prevention and Response

Mechanism (JIPRM), just as during the previous round of talks on December 17-18, 2008. (Note: the final agreed version of the Proposal on the JIPRM was emailed to EUR/CARC on February 19. End Note.)

14. (SBU) The Georgian delegation was represented by Deputy FM Giga Bokeria. While the Tbilisi-backed Head of the Temporary Administrative Unit for South Ossetia, Dmitri Sanakoyev, and Abkhaz government-in-exile member Ada Marshania were both present in the Working Group, neither took the floor. Bokeria was measured and constructive throughout the talks, emphasizing on several occasions that the Georgian delegation would be flexible on issues relating to status. Bokeria welcomed UN Security Council Resolution 1866, and repeated on several occasions that the August 12 ceasefire agreement called on Russia to return its troops to pre-conflict positions. On the JIPRM, Bokeria was willing to compromise on numerous points within the text, insisting only that no mention be made of the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

15. (SBU) By contrast, the de facto South Ossetian delegation, led by Deputy Prime Minister Boris Chochiev, repeatedly re-opened discussions on sections of the text that had already been agreed, attempting to pocket concessions only to later take back their own compromises. A visibly frustrated Morel continuously interceded to urge the South Ossetians to be more flexible and less inflammatory, but without much success.

16. (SBU) Russian Deputy FM Karasin also proved rather inflexible on numerous points. For example, when the final draft of the JIPRM agreement was circulated and the title was changed so that the words &Proposals for were removed immediately preceding the phrase &Joint Incident Response and Prevention Mechanisms, Karasin insisted that the term &Proposals be kept. Both Morel and Verbeke argued his

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insistence was illogical, and even trifling, but Karasin kept his ground, even with the EU, UN, OSCE, U.S., and Georgian representatives arguing the change was simply equivalent to removing the term &draft from a text that had been finalized. Karasin also insisted on diluting the language proposed by the Co-Chairs on access for the international monitoring organizations to the separatist territories. Thus, the final text reads that the participants of the mechanisms &could discuss...follow up to incidents...as appropriate...through agreed joint visits. Finally, Karasin made reference on several occasions to the alleged buildup of Georgian &spetznaz forces along the &borders with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and called for an immediate Non-Use of Force pledge from Georgia to be signed with the leaders of the separatist &republics.

17. (SBU) EUMM Head Ambassador Hansjorg Haber categorically rebutted Karasin's assertion that Georgian spetznaz forces were massing in the areas adjacent to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Haber explained that the Georgian Ministries of Defense and Internal Affairs had both signed Memoranda of Understanding with the EUMM, and that the EUMM was in a position to monitor Georgian troop movements very closely in these areas. Haber praised the Georgian side for providing a model of military transparency and for cooperating so readily with the EUMM. Haber also regretted that he had been unable to sign a similar agreement with the Russian side, and was unable to have regular contacts with Russian military commanders or the separatist militias. A/S Fried also raised this issue, arguing that Russia could not demand military transparency from Georgia while being completely inflexible on the issue of its own military transparency, particularly with reports of new Russian bases being constructed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Although Karasin backed down after this initial exchange, he made the same claims in a smaller working group on the second day of the talks.

18. (SBU) On the issue of the Non-Use of Force, Karasin

praised UNSCR 1866 for referring to the principle of Non-Use of Force and called on Georgia to sign agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Fried agreed with Karasin that this was a vital principle, and suggested that the next round of Geneva talks be devoted to this subject. In discussions on the margins of the talks, however, the Russian side was unwilling to agree to any resumption of the talks prior to June, despite Morel,s and Verbeke,s repeated calls for holding the next round of talks prior to the UN Secretary General,s mandated report on Georgia, due on May 15.

¶9. (C) In the IDP working group, Russian and South Ossetian participants refused to accept the joint offer of the UN and EU to deliver humanitarian assistance from two directions simultaneously: (1) via Russia, a longer, more expensive route favored by Moscow and Tskhinvali and opposed by Tbilisi; and (2) via undisputed Georgia, a shorter and safer route favored by Tbilisi and opposed by Moscow and Tskhinvali. Despite Georgia,s agreement to the northern route as well as the southern one, the Russian and South Ossetian participants blocked the proposal with spurious arguments that the UN could not be trusted to deliver humanitarian aid without generating (unspecified) security threats, and that the route from undisputed Georgia was more dangerous (even though UN guidelines dub this southern route safer than the northern one from Russia and across unsecured South Ossetia). The EU and UNHCR Co-Chairs were infuriated by this Russian and South Ossetian obstructionism, and concurred with DAS Bryza,s observation that such behavior was contrary to UNSCR 1866,s call for &unhindered8 humanitarian assistance.

Comment

¶10. (C) The one-step-forward-half-a-step-back pattern of the Geneva talks reflects both Russian uncertainty about its next steps in Georgia and South Ossetian/Abkhazian insecurity about their own regimes. The Russians seem torn between wanting to stabilize and consolidate their tactical victory in the war last August and wanting to keep up tension with Georgia. The breakaway regimes seem to fear outside monitors that could interrupt or expose their ongoing pressure on remaining Georgian residents and general lawlessness, especially in South Ossetia. The Georgians, by contrast, were constructive and creative, and ought to be encouraged to

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keep looking at the conflicts from a long-term perspective.
STORELLA